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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000283

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: AMBASSADOR PRESSES PRIME MINISTER FOR
PROGRESS ON DIALOGUE, PUSHES BACK ON SYRIA VISIT

REF: SKOPJE 270 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(B) & (D).

SUMMARY.

11. (C) The Ambassador met with PM Gruevski April 11 to press him for greater flexibility in meeting eAlbanian opposition DUI's demands in exchange for DUI's commitment to end its boycott of Parliament. Gruevski asserted he had already conceded much of what DUI wanted in terms of a list of laws requiring a Badinter/double majority vote, but was willing to give a bit more. He was unwilling to give in to DUI's insistence on a law to compensate victims of the 2001 conflict, but showed willingness to consider a compromise "social package" of benefits that he thought would address DUI's demands in that regard. He was not enthusiastic about DUI's demand for a language law, but said he would consider a draft law if it did not exceed his view of Framework Agreement requirements. He failed entirely to address, however, DUI's red line issue of reconstituting the Parliamentary Inter-ethnic Relations Committee (IEC). When pressed by the Ambassador on the recent unannounced visit by FM Milososki to Syria, Gruevski acknowledged the trip to have been a mistake and ordered an immediate freeze on further GOM talks with Damascus. End Summary.

PRESSING FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE ENDGAME

12. (C) Building on continued momentum in Working Group discussions between eAlbanian opposition DUI and the government (reftel), the Ambassador met with Prime Minister Gruevski on April 11 to urge him to demonstrate flexibility in responding to DUI's demands for a list of Badinter (double majority) laws and for reconstituting the parliamentary Inter-ethnic Relations Committee, in return for DUI's agreement to return to Parliament. She suggested as additional incentives for DUI a government offer of a social package for "victims of conflict," which would benefit some NLA veterans and invalids, and their families. In addition, she said, Gruevski could offer DUI leader Ahmeti a guarantee that DUI would have a voice in shaping any future law on use of languages. The Ambassador added that the dialogue process had reached a point where both sides could claim joint successes; Gruevski should seize the moment and "build a path" for DUI to follow back to Parliament.

PM GRUEVSKI -- REACHING THE LIMITS OF FLEXIBILITY ON BADINTER LAWS

13. (C) PM Gruevski said that he believed the government had conceded on as many Badinter laws (39 of 127 originally proposed by DUI) as it possibly could. Some Badinter laws had been agreed to, he said, "to show goodwill." He would offer a few more to Ahmeti during a meeting April 13, but would not agree "to all of them." Once the list was agreed by both sides, Gruevski wanted it incorporated in the draft parliamentary rulebook, which he said would be completed the following week. He explained this would make it impossible for the IEC, if its majority changed, to change the decisions on Badinter laws agreed during the "dialogue."

COMPROMISE PACKAGE FOR NLA VETERANS AND INVALIDS

14. (C) Gruevski said that he could not agree to Ahmeti's proposal for a law on NLA veterans and invalids. Such a law -- which would effectively give NLA veterans the same legal status as Macedonian military and police veterans who had been involved in the 2001 conflict -- would encounter strong resistance from his core supporters. The government could, however, agree to "quiet support" for the veterans and their families -- some 300 persons total. The government would try to employ those who could work, and would provide social funding support for those who could not. That approach could not be publicized, however, since that "would provoke ethnic Macedonians." Gruevski believed his coalition partners and DUI could agree to his proposal, which would resolve the issue without exciting emotions on either side.

NO ENTHUSIASM FOR LANGUAGE LAW

15. (C) Gruevski said he previously had asked DUI to outline
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what they thought would be the key new points in a language law. DUI had begun to formulate a list of those points, but was now proposing to submit a draft language law to the government instead. Gruevski said his party, VMRO-DPMNE, did not believe it was essential to adopt such a law, but would consider draft legislation as long as it did not add requirements beyond those specified in the Framework Agreement. He added that he would meet with Ahmeti on April 13 to discuss all of these issues.

PUSHING BACK ON SYRIA TRIP -- GRUEVSKI SUSPENDS FURTHER TALKS

16. (C) Referring to FM Milososki's surprise visit to Damascus April 9-11, the Ambassador expressed USG dismay that we had not been consulted beforehand. She noted that the SARG remained a supporter of terrorist activities in Lebanon, Iraq, and Israel; had cracked down on civil society at home; and had failed to honor commitments under UN Security Council Resolutions. We viewed attempts to engage Damascus at the moment as counterproductive, she said.

17. (C) Gruevski said Milososki's trip had been a mistake, and that the sole intent of the visit had been to establish diplomatic relations with Syria under Macedonia's constitutional name. He took the Ambassador's points into account, however, and said he would order an immediate suspension of further talks with the Syrians on the matter. He underscored Macedonia's continuing commitment to partnership with the U.S. and other countries in the Global War on Terror, and said he did not want his country on the wrong side of that fight. The Foreign Minister later confirmed to us that all further activities related to Macedonian-Syrian ties had been suspended indefinitely.

COMMENT

18. (C) Currently riding high in the polls, and with DUI having been recently abandoned by its eAlbanian PDP coalition partners, Gruevski probably believes he does not have to be magnanimous with Ahmeti, although he does not want us or the EU to blame him if the political dialogue process stalls. He

is therefore likely to offer a minimalist "take it or leave it" package of incentives to DUI at the April 13 meeting, under the assumption that DUI will have to accept the offer as the best possible deal it can get under the circumstances.

If DUI rejects the offer, our task will be to ensure the dialogue process continues, and to search for options both sides can present to move the discussions closer to a win-win compromise outcome for both sides that returns DUI to Parliament and allows Gruevski to forge ahead with NATO and EU related reforms and implementation. Although the dialogue process has not led to any major breakthroughs yet, the small gains it has produced are reason enough to keep it alive.

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